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ABSTRACT

Research has confirmed the usefulness of Tinto's model in predicting undergraduate student withdrawal from college and in conceptualizing and explaining the process of student attrition. Tinto proposed that college students are more likely to withdraw if they are insufficiently integrated or if they maintain values sufficiently different from the values of the college they are attending. This study was conducted to further explore the utility of Tinto's model and to investigate the nature of the process Tinto describes. Subjects were 25 first time, full-time college freshmen. Interviews were conducted with 10 freshmen in Fall 1988 and with all 25 in Spring 1989. Four students who withdrew from the university were interviewed during Summer 1989. The findings revealed that the institutional experiences of living on campus and participating in extracurricular activities appeared to enhance the students' social integration by exposing them to other students and to opportunities to interact and develop friendships with other students. The external experiences of interaction with non-university high school friends and family appeared to interfere with the students' opportunities to socialize with other students. These findings confirm the usefulness of Tinto's model in understanding student perspectives regarding the pressures that lead to their persistence decisions. (NB)

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ELABORATION OF TINTO'S MODEL OF COLLEGE STUDENT DEPARTURE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF FRESHMAN EXPERIENCES

Presented at the
1990 Annual Meetings of the
American Educational Research Association

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ELABORATION OF TINTO'S MODEL OF COLLEGE STUDENT DEPARTURE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF FRESHMAN EXPERIENCES

Substantial research has confirmed the usefulness of Tinto's model in predicting undergraduate student withdrawal from college and in conceptualizing and explaining the process of student attrition. This study, designed to further explore the utility of Tinto's model and to investigate more minutely the nature of the process Tinto describes, was the first stage of an ongoing longitudinal project designed to examine undergraduate student attrition, development, progress, and outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

The rich literature on college student departure affirms longstanding interest in college student attrition. Additionally, because of recent efforts to document learning and development during the college years, this research concern has extended beyond attrition to the consequences and effects of college attendance for those who persist to graduation. Several theorists have developed models to explain college student attrition (Bean, 1980; Kamens, 1971; Rootman, 1972; Spady, 1970, Tinto, 1975). One of the most widely accepted views of institutional departure is embodied in Tinto's (1975) model, based on Durkheim's (1951) assertion that suicide is more likely to occur when individuals are insufficiently integrated into society. Tinto proposed, analogously, that college students are more likely to withdraw if they are insufficiently integrated or if they maintain values sufficiently different from the values of the college they are attending. He and others have developed these propositions into a complex explanation of commitment, academic and social integration, and college persistence, proposing that students' levels of commitment to the goal of completing college, and to their specific institution, ultimately determine

integration and the drop-out decision. Initially student's background characteristics influence commitment, but after matriculation the individual's experiences with the social and academic aspects of an institution begin to shape these commitments. Students who become adequately integrated into the social and academic systems of their college through participation in extracurricular activities, interactions with other students, interactions with faculty, etc., develop or maintain strong commitments to attaining a college degree. Students with strong commitments and intentions in these areas will be most likely to persist in college and those with weak commitments will be the most likely to withdraw.

Although these explanations are insightful, it is necessary to investigate these processes far more minutely. Tinto has pointed out that

> the mere occurrence of interactions between the individual and others within the institution need not ensure that integration occurs–that depends on the character of those interactions and the manner in which the individual comes to perceive them as rewarding. Thus the term membership may be taken as connoting the perception on the part of the individual of having become a competent member of an academic or social community within the college. Therefore, no study of the roots of student departure is complete without reference to student perceptions. Similarly, no institution should initiate an attempt to deal with departure without first ascertaining student perceptions of the problem being addressed (1987, p. 127).

Recently Tinto (1987) expanded the longitudinal aspect of his conceptions by applying Van Gannep's (1960) notion of the rites of passage in tribal societies to the undergraduate's integration into the college community. Tinto describes the longitudinal process of integration into college life as movement from membership in one community (e.g. high school, parents) to membership in another community (college) through three related and interactive mechanisms: (1) separation from past communities (high school, parents, etc.), (2) transition into the new, college community through learning the values and expectations of that community, and (3) incorporation into the college community

through actually adopting the norms and behavioral patterns of the new community. Tinto (1988) explains that the concept of the rites of passage from one community to another aids in illuminating the process of institutional departure over the entire college career.

The predictive and explanatory power of Tinto's original model of student attrition has been demonstrated by several researchers for students at residential colleges (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1977, 1979a, 1979b, 1980, 1983; Terenzini, Lorang, & Pascarella, 1981; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1977, 1978; Terenzini, Pascarella, Theophilides, & Lorang, 1983, 1985), and other research has substantiated the utility of this model for non-traditional student populations (Beltzer, 1983; Pascarella, Duby, & Iverson, 1983; Sweet, 1986; Weidman & White, 1985). Additionally, Terenzini and Wright (1987) have provided support for the utility of the Tinto model "for the analysis of educational [effects and] outcomes other than attrition" (p. 163). The statistical evidence provided by these studies has been helpful in supporting and understanding the theoretical framework set forth by Tinto. However, as Tinto himself (1987, 1988) and Ewell (1988) have recommended, much deeper exploration of student experiences is needed to provide a richer understanding of how these processes are actually manifest in the college environment. Tinto, for example, has called for further

> research like that of Neumann (1985) and others, which employs ethnographic procedures to explore how students understand the temporal quality of their college careers. Despite the mass of quantitative evidence on reasons for student departure, we do not fully understand, for example, how students perceive their own departure at varying points during their college careers" (Tinto, 1988, pp. 450-451).

Additionally, although a few studies have added to the understanding of Tinto's recent conceptualization of the longitudinal character of the attrition process (Louis & Potter, 1986; Neumann, 1985), more research is needed to substantiate this view. As Tinto (1988) said,

> "we need studies which consciously attempt to discern whether the process of departure varies over time. For instance, we should ascertain whether the process of leaving which characterizes departure during the first semester is similar to that which describes departure after the first year and whether the widely studied process of departure at the end of the first year looks like that which marks departure afterwards. By extension, we should consider the possibility that the temporal quality of departure may vary somewhat for different types of students..." (p. 450).

The longstanding and recently renewed interest in these questions have come about because of increased interest in institutional accountability for the quality of students' undergraduate education (Terenzini's [1989] succinct summary addresses many of these issues). Although in some quarters this movement toward accountability focuses on documentation to some organizationally higher authority, in many institutions the goal is to enhance students' campus experience. For institutional assessment to guide program modification and improvement, it is necessary not only to measure outcomes such as withdrawal or knowledge gains, but to understand more fully the processes leading to those outcomes -- to "get behind outcomes," as Hutchings (1989) has emphasized. The ultimate purpose, for example, would be to modify student support programs or academic efforts based on the more complete understanding provided by these fuller research studies.

This study was undertaken as part of one institution's resolve to assess undergraduate education not merely to account for itself externally but, more importantly, to uncover needs and discover ways that the institution could improve. Certainly preventing unnecessary student withdrawal is a major feature of any university's process of improvement. For these reasons, this study examined both the factors important in Tinto's original model of student withdrawal and his conceptualization of the longitudinal process of student withdrawal. The study examined student perceptions of the processes and stages

proposed by Tinto, and examined specifically how these constructs interact to influence both persistence decisions and the effects of college for students who do persist.

The study yielded findings in three major areas: (1) the fit between students' perceptions of their own college experiences and the propositions of Tinto's original model, (2) the fit between students' perceptions of college experiences and Tinto's recent conceptualization of the longitudinal character over the entire college career, and (3) the utility of using Tinto's model for the analysis of college student outcomes other than attrition. This paper deals with the first major area -- the fit between students' perceptions of their own college experiences and the propositions of Tinto's original model. Even more particularly, this paper focuses on one aspect of Tinto's model, as highlighted in Figure 1 -- students' experiences while attending college that influenced their social integration. In other papers we will discuss the study's findings regarding other aspects of Tinto's conceptions.

Method

The study, conducted at a large, public, A.A.U. research university, drew from the first year of data collected for a longitudinal project that will continue for five years. In this first year, a systematic sample of 25 first time, full time freshmen was drawn. Interviews were conducted with a random sample of 10 of these students in Fall, 1988, and all 25 in Spring, 1989. Four students from the sample withdrew from the University during or immediately after their freshman year; these four were interviewed during Summer, 1989, regarding their departure. As part of the continuing project, all subjects will be interviewed once each semester for four additional years.

The interviews were designed to address three major themes: (1) Tinto's model and views regarding the longitudinal process of dropping out, (2) questions of local interest such as math and composition course placement or advising, and (3) college "effects" or outcomes. Standard questions were used for each of these areas but the interview structure was fluid; for example, questions were posed conversationally as they flowed from earlier responses. During their interviews, subjects also rated the gains they had made in thirty areas of college life, and explained the college experiences that contributed to these gains.

The interviews were initially analyzed using strategies similar to Spradley's (1980) domain, taxonomic, componential, and theme analysis. The interviews addressed and yielded data on a broad range of topics. Consequently, the interviews were initially scanned to identify the specific topics discussed by the students. Because most of the interview questions were based on constructs identified in Tinto's Model, many of the identified topics were directly associated with these concepts. However, other topics, common across all or many of the interviews, emerged from the data. The list of identified topics included subjects such as high school friends, residence, possibility of transfer, institutional commitment, and advising.

We then divided the interviews into the identified topics by compiling data relevant to each topic into separate documents. For example, all interview passages that related to high school friends were extracted from the interviews and compiled in one document. The same was done for all passages regarding new friends, and the remaining identified categories.

The subsequent analysis was guided largely by the conceptual framework for the study--that is, Tinto's conceptions. Consequently, the next step in the analysis was to search for patterns or themes across topics, already identified by Tinto and those researching his model. For example, for the purposes of this paper, we scanned the topic documents for student experiences that influenced social integration. Topics recognized as containing this specific theme were then more minutely examined to identify the particular composition of the relationship between this set of experiences and social integration. For instance, through scanning we found that the topic document for high school friends contained experiences that influenced social integration. This information was then analyzed further to discover the specific ways in which the students' experiences with their high school friends affected their social integration.

As this more in-depth analysis continued, the topics that related to social integration and the more specific elements contained within them were organized into a taxonomy which became the structure for presenting the results of this analysis. The taxonomy is summarized in Table 1.

It is important to note that although Tinto's theories guided the initial search for general themes, topics and themes discovered in the data not directly addressed in Tinto's model were not disregarded. However, we initially used Tinto's model as a guide because, as Miles & Huberman (1984) state

> One cannot decide in a vacuum which of these classes [topics or themes found in the data] is "right" or "best". There must be a clear linkage to the study's conceptual framework and research questions (p. 223).

Several other precautions recommended by Miles and Huberman (1984) and others (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Erickson, 1986) were taken to address the validity of the findings.

First, no assertion was made unless it was validated by several of the interviews. This strategy is referred to by many as triangulation, and defined by Miles & Huberman as validating a finding by subjecting it to a series of independent measures. Second, two researchers designed the study and analyzed the findings to protect against the bias of adopting favored, incomplete, or invalid hypotheses, and to provide an additional mechanism for triangulation. Third, a deliberate search was made for evidence that might disconfirm hypotheses developed in all stages of analysis. This evidence was used to modify, or explain exceptions to, key assertions.

Results for Student Experiences Influencing Social Integration

The interviews revealed common patterns of student experiences influencing social integration, experiences both within the social environment of the college (institutional experiences), and external to the social context of the institution (external experiences). Institutional and external student experiences are discussed below, with interview quotes illustrating our assertions regarding the students' common patterns of experiences.[1]

Institutional Experiences and Social Integration

Two types of institutional experiences stood out in their effects on social integration: living on campus in residence halls, and participation in extracurricular activities. Because both of these routes to social integration have been discussed by other researchers, their emergence in this study was not surprising. What this study did find, however, was further

[1]The quotes shown in the sections below are representative of the larger body of data obtained through the interviews; they were selected to illustrate the nature and the variety of student experiences in each area discussed.

evidence on the nature of these two influences, and consequently evidence on exactly how they influence social integration.

Living On Campus

Of the 25 students interviewed, 20 students lived on campus during all or part of their freshman year, 2 lived off campus in an apartment, and 3 lived off campus in their parents' homes. The interviews revealed that living on campus enhanced the students' opportunities for integration into the social systems of the college in four ways: meeting other students, developing student friendships, shifting away from high school friends, and gaining information about social opportunities on campus.

Although the interviews contained many complaints about the residence halls (crowded conditions, lack of privacy, roommate problems, noise, etc.), all students living on campus spoke of the increased opportunity to "meet" other students. Students living in the residence halls said:

> Interviewer: Did you move into the dorm because you felt you wanted to get to know other students?
> Student: No. I didn't but people said that that's what I'd do, and they were right. You really meet a lot of people because you're in such close quarters. You interact with them a lot more.

> Interviewer: Why did you decide to live in the dorms?
> Student: Just to meet people. I didn't want to at first. My parents wanted me to. The only reason I agreed was that it was easy to meet people. It's nice. You've got company all around you, people you can talk with.

Furthermore, the students who lived off campus spoke of their lost opportunities to meet other students and reported the difficulties of meeting students in classes.

> I get the impression that everybody seems to have an easier time meeting people. Most of them are on campus so they have an easier time of it. So I guess the difference between us would be that they have more connections than I do.

> I keep telling myself I should meet people, but I never do. It's hard when you live off campus. It makes it harder. It's hard to meet people just in classes.

The students living in the residence halls not only increased their opportunities to meet other students, but also reported developing friendships with their roommates or other students they met through the halls.

> We [my roommate and I] just hit it off really well. She's a year older, which doesn't make a difference now. We are really good friends and we'll go out to parties together, we'll eat together, do a lot of things together...
>
> Right now I'm living in a dorm. At first my roommate and I did not get along. But as the year has gone by, we're totally good friends.
>
> Interviewer: How do you typically spend your weekends?
> My three roommates, we all basically hang out, study together, because three of us out of the four have a lot of our classes together and we study together and go to our classes together, eat, do whatever together.

Living in residence halls also facilitated several students' shift from spending time with high school friends to spending time with college friends. While 7 of the 20 students who lived on campus had relatively easy access to their high school friends (that is, the town in which they had attended high school was less than 200 miles from the college campus), most reported that although they still interacted with their high school friends often, they were spending an increasing amount of time with students they met through their residence hall. A quote from a student who spent his first semester as a freshman off campus and second semester on campus explicitly illustrates this shift:

> Interviewer: The people you spend the most time with – are they students at the University?
> Student: Well, now probably, yes.
> Interviewer: Has that changed since last semester?
> Student: Probably, yeah. I used to spend all of my time with friends back home. Now I'm here more of the time, so I spend more time with people here.
> Interviewer: Have you just recently met people here?
> Student: Yeah, especially with the dorm, you get to meet a lot of people.

Social integration was also enhanced by living on campus because students in residence halls had more opportunities to gain information about other social activities on campus. For one thing, students who lived on campus were presented with more social opportunities merely because of the amount of time they spent on campus in comparison to their off-campus peers.

> When you're on campus and in a dorm, you know what's going on a little more.
>
> I think you loose touch if you're off campus. And you can get more involved with things if you're living closer to everything.
>
> Interviewer: Does living off campus affect your involvement in school?
> Student: To some point, because I don't stay around a lot. I just go home. Sometimes I stay later in the day after my classes, but mostly I just go home after classes so I'm not around here a lot.

Secondly, students in the residence halls found out about campus social opportunities from flyers, R.A.'s, and other students in the residence halls. Eighteen of the 20 students who lived on campus during their freshman year, and only 2 of the 5 students living off campus, participated in one or more extracurricular activity (sororities, fraternities, recreational clubs, professional clubs, band, and intramural sports). Thirteen of the 18 on-campus students participating in extracurricular activities found out about at least one activity through the residence halls. The students comments illustrate this benefit:

> Interviewer: Are you participating in any extracurricular activities?
> Student: I'm playing softball for my dorm.
> Interviewer: How did you find out about the softball team?
> Student: It's advertised. Our RA is pretty good about putting things up all over our wing and saying, "If you want to join this you can go there and sign up." And I have a friend across the hall that heard about it also, and she asked me if I wanted to play. So that's how I heard.
>
> Interviewer: Do you think that living in a dorm has helped you to become more involved in school?
> Student: I think so. Because just being on a wing where you see people in and out doing a lot of activities, it makes me think it seems like they're having a good

time, maybe I should try doing something. Then I always hear about this club was great or how that club was really fun and it makes me really interested.

Interviewer: How does living in the dorm affect your involvement in University activities?
Student: Well, there's usually things posted around about activities. I go to some of them and they've been really interesting. [Living in the dorm] sort of alerts me to anything I might be interested in.

In summary, living on campus promoted the students' institutional social integration in at least four general ways. First, it provided students the opportunity to meet other students in their residence halls. All students interviewed reported that the residence halls were a good place "to meet people". Second, it provided a setting in which students developed friendships with other students. Many on-campus students reported that their closest friends were their roommates or other students they had met in their residence hall. Third, living in residence halls influenced students' separation from high school friends, as Tinto's (1987) more recent conceptualization would suggest. And fourth, the dorms were avenues through which these students found out about other social activities occurring on campus. Ninety percent of the students in the sample who lived on campus were involved in at least one extracurricular activity, and approximately 72% of those students found out about the activity by virtue of living on campus. The next section expands these findings about the role of extracurricular involvement in social integration.

Extracurricular Activities

Twenty of the 25 students interviewed participated in at least one extracurricular activity during their freshman year, participation that encouraged their social integration in many of the same ways that living on campus influenced social integration. For example, the students reported that through participation in extracurricular activities they had numerous opportunities to meet and develop friendships with other students.

Interviewer: What benefits do you think you've gotten from participating in pep band?
Student: Just meeting people. It's better to watch the basketball games with a bunch of people you know and they're all cheering. You can enjoy it a lot more than if you're just there by yourself. It's better, it really is. When somebody makes a shot you can high five somebody.

Interviewer: What have been the benefits to you of participating in the sorority?
Student: I can't even list them: Something to do on weekends, I've made new friends, I've broadened my horizons. Just getting to meet new people. There's so much. It's helped me academically and socially.

Joining the fraternity helped me to learn, get to know a lot of people really fast. Making the transition from high school to college wasn't really that hard for me to make because I went away to boarding school. but joining a fraternity, getting an immediate group of friends, gave me immediate social life.

Moreover, although living on campus and participation in extracurricular activities appeared to have similar effects on social integration, the students were more explicit in expressing the connections between extracurricular activities (often referred to as "being involved"), social integration, and their own persistence. For example:

It's still hard for me socially and academically here. It's really good to get involved no matter what it is. I didn't really get involved in the beginning of the year and now I'm starting to. I think it would have helped a lot more had I been involved. And I'm not in a Greek system and I don't choose to be. I'm going to get involved in other things next year.

Interviewer: What advice would you give someone who was coming here as a freshman next year?
Student: Go through Rush or just get involved with something else [on campus] so you have something to do on the weekends. Otherwise, I don't think you're going to meet very many people. If you don't have a good time, then you're not going to like it. If you like the school, but you have nothing to do on Friday and Saturday, you're going to get burned out and you're not going to come back.

I think that if I wouldn't have joined a sorority, if I wouldn't have done anything on campus, and I would have had the same experience, I don't think I'd be here this semester. I think I'd be in a different university.

Everyone I know that does things either Rushing or joining clubs or whatever, it's not like it takes up much time, they don't. But it just seems like they're keeping busy, and that's what you have to do your freshman year, I think, is keep totally

> busy. Otherwise you start thinking like "Oh, I could be doing this" or you start thinking that you're getting homesick or that you don't like it.

One student attributed a change in her institutional commitment to her experiences and involvement in a sorority.

> Interviewer: Last fall when we talked you told me that you were going to stay here a year and then transfer.
> Student: Not now. I'm definitely going to stay another year... Because with the sorority, now I'm kind of getting more into it. For a while there, I wanted to drop out of it, but now with all that's going on, I'm getting into it... I could see myself staying until I graduate. I really can now.

In summary, extracurricular activities influenced social integration in ways similar to the influences of residence hall living. Further, these influences were seen by the students as more explicitly linking them to the college environment. A few even expressed their perception that the extracurriculum made the difference in their persistence to the second year of college.

External Experiences and Social Integration

Several types of external experiences influenced the students' integration into the social life of the college. The most influential of these were experiences with high school friends -- including boyfriends and girlfriends -- and experiences with family.

High School Friends

The students' social integration was influenced by interactions with two types of high school friends: high school friends who were not attending the same university and those who were.

Non-University High School Friends. During their freshman year, the students began a process of shifting from association and affiliation with high school friends to alliances with college friends. The nature and progress of this shift, which we saw as a process of

becoming more socially integrated, differed depending on two factors: access to high school friends not attending the same university, and residence. These two factors interacted to form four groups of students with qualitatively different experiences in shifting their association with high school friends to association with college friends. The four groups -- 1) easy access to high school friends and living off campus, 2) easy access to high school friends and living on campus, 3) limited access to friends and living off campus, and 4) limited access to friends and living on campus -- are illustrated in Figure 2 along with quotes representing the general experience of each group.

Students who had easy access to their high school friends (as mentioned above, those who attended high schools that were less than 200 miles from the college), and who lived off campus during their freshman year made the least progress of all four groups in shifting from high school to college friends. The off-campus students with accessible high school friends reported that they socialized almost exclusively with these friends.

> Friday nights I usually go to my high school football games and just talk with friends...I don't go to watch the teams, I just go there to talk.

> Interviewer: Which friends do you go out with? Are they from the University or from high school?
> Student: Most are from my high school, yeah. Not here [at the university].

The second group of students, those with easy access to their high school friends but who lived on campus, made more progress transferring their associations, and consequently made more progress toward their social integration.

> I considered living [off campus] with my friend, the one I go home with all the time, but I'm glad that I didn't because in the dorm I've met people I would never have met. I would have stuck with the same group that I know [at home].

> Interviewer: Last time you said that you were considering transferring. Do you still think you will transfer?
> Student: Probably not. At the beginning of the year my attitude was totally different because I wasn't used to it here. But now I am, and I've kind of found my niche.

However, social integration is still difficult for these students. Many students in the second group reported that interaction with their high school friends interfered with their "involvement in" the university, usually because of the amount of time spent with these friends. One student explained how returning home at least every other weekend interfered with his interaction with other college students.

> I've tried to get together with other friends [at the university]. I'm always not in the [dorm] room when they call. I always tell them to call me every weekend, but I'm down the hall or I've gone home. So I come back to school and one of them in my classes says, "Well, we did this; we tried to call you."

For students living on campus with easy access to high school friends, their girlfriends and boyfriends particularly complicated the process of transferring ties from past associations to new student friends. Again, the time they spent interacting with their boyfriend or girlfriend interfered with their involvement in college social activities. A student who returned home to see his girlfriend every weekend explains:

> I feel like it's a waste for me to go out and get involved [at the university] because I feel like, "Well, I'm not going to be here for that [campus activity], well I'm not going to be here for that one either.

The interactions of one student with her high school boyfriend not only interfered with the amount of time she spent on campus, but with her persistence. This student reported that she was transferring to another institution that her boyfriend would be attending the following fall. She said, "I have nothing against ...[this university] at all, but I want to be with my boyfriend." She described how her decision affected her subsequent social integration.

> If I knew I wouldn't be transferring I think I'd be more apt to progress my friendships [with students at the university].

The students who had limited access to their high school friends experienced the shift differently. Whether or not these students had begun developing friendships with other students, their ties with high school friends were weakened because of limited access. One out-of-state student explained why this process occurred for her:

> It's weird how people fade away. I mean, all the experiences that you talk to them [about], and read so often [in their letters], and write, but you are kind of fading away from them. I know that we'll always be good friends, but it's just that when you're not living [near] someone, it's really hard to keep in touch.

Off-campus students having limited access to their high school friends experienced the shift in ties from high school friends to college friends in more distinct steps, rather than as a continuous process. Living off campus, these students had limited access to meeting and developing friendships with other college students (as discussed above), as well as limited access to high school friends. Consequently, even though these students' ties with their high school friends had abruptly weakened, they did not have adequate opportunities to quickly shift those ties to college students. These students reported developing those ties later in their freshman year, once they had begun participation in extracurricular activities. They reported that initially they felt isolated:

> I get a bit feeling of loneliness. I like the independence, but loneliness isn't good. I live off campus...I don't have that many friends.

Students living on campus with limited access to high school friends, the fourth group, also had difficulty shifting their ties from high school friends to college friends.

> I still feel like I'm in the middle--still tied to my close friends and they've all gone off to different schools. I'm getting to know more and more people I consider as close friends here, but I still feel like I'm in the middle thinking, "Well, who are my really good friends and who aren't?"

However, on-campus students with limited access to high school friends made the most progress toward shifting their ties. At the same time that their association with high school

friends weakened, their opportunities for meeting and developing friendships increased by virtue of residence hall living. These were the students who most often reported developing friendships with other students. Some even linked these friendships to their persistence.

> I have my grounds. I have so many things that I couldn't leave now. All my friends and everything. I have a lot of friends [at this university].

On-Campus High School Friends. Although interaction with high school friends not attending the same university had a negative effect on the social integration of the students, interaction with high school friends who were attending the same college enhanced social integration. Students whose high school friends also attended the university reported that facing a large university was more tolerable when experienced with an established friend (e.g., "We walked around lost together. That way you feel like you're not the only one"). In addition, students from the same high schools introduced each other to other college students, provided information about extracurricular activities, and provided an immediate support system that increased the students' institutional commitment.

> I applied to...[another college], but I applied late and so they were sort of slow [getting back to me]. So they said "you can go to another school and direct transfer in". I don't know if I'd really enjoy it there, because a lot of my friends are here--that's another reason. A lot of people from... [my high school] are here--good, good, friends. As I said, I'm rooming with two pretty good friends of mine.

In summary, while interactions with high school friends attending the university enhanced the students' integration, interaction with non-university high school students often did not. The students were in the process of shifting their ties from high school friends not attending the university to college friends, a process directly related to their social integration. Progress made toward this shift during the freshman year depended on at least two notable factors: residence and access to high school friends. Students with accessible high school friends had more difficulty separating from them and developing ties

with college students than did students having limited access. Overall, living on campus facilitated the transition, and consequently the students' social integration.

Family Experiences

During their freshman year, the students also experienced a shift or reorganization in their relationship with their parents. However, this shift did not signify a change in alliance with parents to alliance with college friends, but rather a change from the students' reliance on parents to reliance on themselves, or independence. Not surprisingly, limited access to parents (e.g. attending college out of state or living on campus instead of with parents), expedited this change. The students explained:

> I'm on my own now, definitely. I decide when I go to bed. I decide what I eat. My parents are no longer there to tell me when I have to come home. I manage my car myself. I wash my clothes myself. I still have a lot more responsibility later on in life. I still have to pay all my living expenses and stuff, which will come along -- but right now I've learned a lot just by college alone.

> Yeah, they [my parents] are...[out of state] and I'm here, so obviously I'm independent, making my own decisions. A lot of it is time management. Before it's like [your parents say] "You're doing your homework before you ... watch T.V. Write that paper Friday afternoon so you can go out this weekend." Where now it's like, do whatever you want, and if it doesn't get done, it's your problem.

As these quotes indicate, although the students were becoming more independent, they still had numerous ties to their parents. For example, 24 of the 25 students in the study reported receiving some form of financial support from their parents during their freshman year. The students also reported that their parents still had influence over many of their decisions, including decisions that affected their social integration as well as their persistence. The degree of this influence was, not surprisingly, negatively related to the students' progress toward their independence.

In many cases, the parents' influence inhibited the students' social integration and persistence. Many parents influenced decisions that required the students to displace time spent at the college with time spent at home. For example, some of the parents, living in the same town as the college, requested that the students continue to live at home. One student reported "[My parents said] 'If you're going to be in town, you might as well be at home." Additionally, several parents attempted to persuade students to attend a college or university closer to home.

> I might transfer to...[another college closer to home] next year, because my parents really want me to.

> I'm not ready to transfer yet. My parents have been really bugging me about it. I think by next year I'll be ready to transfer back...[home]. I'm just not ready to transfer yet, just because there's so much here for me right now.

Two of these students transferred to a college closer to home by the beginning of their sophomore year. In follow-up interviews these students reported that their parents' influence was the major factor in their decision to withdraw. They also reported that knowing they were going to transfer while still attending the university decreased their motivation to engage in activities that would increase their social integration. For example, one of these students discontinued participation in extracurricular activities when she realized she would not be returning to the university the next semester.

Parents' influence over decision-making sometimes also led to an increase in the student's social integration and persistence. Several of the students' parents urged them to live on campus, participate in extracurricular activities, and stay in school.

> Sometimes I just want to drop out of school altogether. But then when I think about it, I wouldn't. My parents wouldn't let me anyway.

In summary, the freshmen were not only in the process of shifting their friendships but were also in the process of shifting from reliance on their parents to reliance on themselves. Parents of students making the least progress toward independence still had a great deal of influence over many of the students' decisions, including decisions affecting social integration and persistence. Some parents influenced students to continue to live at home while attending the university or to transfer to an institution closer to home, not only further delaying the students' progress toward independence, but constraining their opportunities for social integration. Other decisions influenced by parents strengthened the students' social integration, such as decisions to live on campus, participate in extracurricular activities, or stay in college.

Summary

Several more general themes emerged from the findings presented above. In general, the institutional experiences discussed above (living on campus and participation in extracurricular activities) enhanced the students' social integration by exposing them to other students and opportunities to interact and develop friendships with other students. The external experiences discussed above, such as interaction with non-university high school friends and family, generally interfered with the students' opportunities to socialize with other students. Often, the students' time and energy taken away by external experiences directly reduced the time and energy available to devote to meeting and developing friendships with other students. In essence, because these two sets of experiences, institutional and external, were at odds, external experiences was itself at odds with social integration and, by extrapolation, with persistence.

Discussion

The findings illustrated above confirmed the usefulness of Tinto's model in understanding students perspectives' regarding the processes that lead to their persistence decisions. The students interviewed in this study made explicit connections between institutional experiences, social integration, and persistence. Additionally, as other research on Tinto's model has confirmed, the students' accounts of their experiences indicated that social integration is positively influenced by participation in extracurricular activities and living on-campus. However, the findings also indicated that other student experiences not explicitly accounted for in Tinto's model--experiences external to the institutional environment such as interactions with high school friends and family -- also affected social integration. In fact, we found that these external experiences directly interfered with the positive effects of institutional experiences on social integration, and were sometimes connected with the decision to withdraw from the institution.

Although external experiences are not explicitly identified in the Tinto model, Tinto and others, while acknowledging that external experiences are purposely excluded from the model, have recognized that "...decisions regarding staying or leaving institutions of higher education are [not] unaffected by events external to the college" (Tinto, 1988, p. 123). Aitkins (1982) found that college withdrawal in the freshman year is related to concern with family and personal problems, and Weidman and Friedmann (1985), in their study of the persistence of women on welfare in a postsecondary training program, extended the Tinto framework to include "extrainstitutional" factors. In his discussion on the longitudinal character of student leaving Tinto suggests that students encounter different sorts of difficulties during different points in their student career that may lead to withdrawal, and

that the difficulties encountered in the first part of the student career are related to separation from past communities, which include high school friends and family.

A quote from Tinto's (1987) book effectively summarizes this study's findings:

> For any person, participation in external communities may serve to counter, rather than support, participation in college communities. This is so not only because the demands of the former may take away time from participation in the latter, but also because the requirements of membership in one may work counter to those for membership in the other (pp. 123-124).

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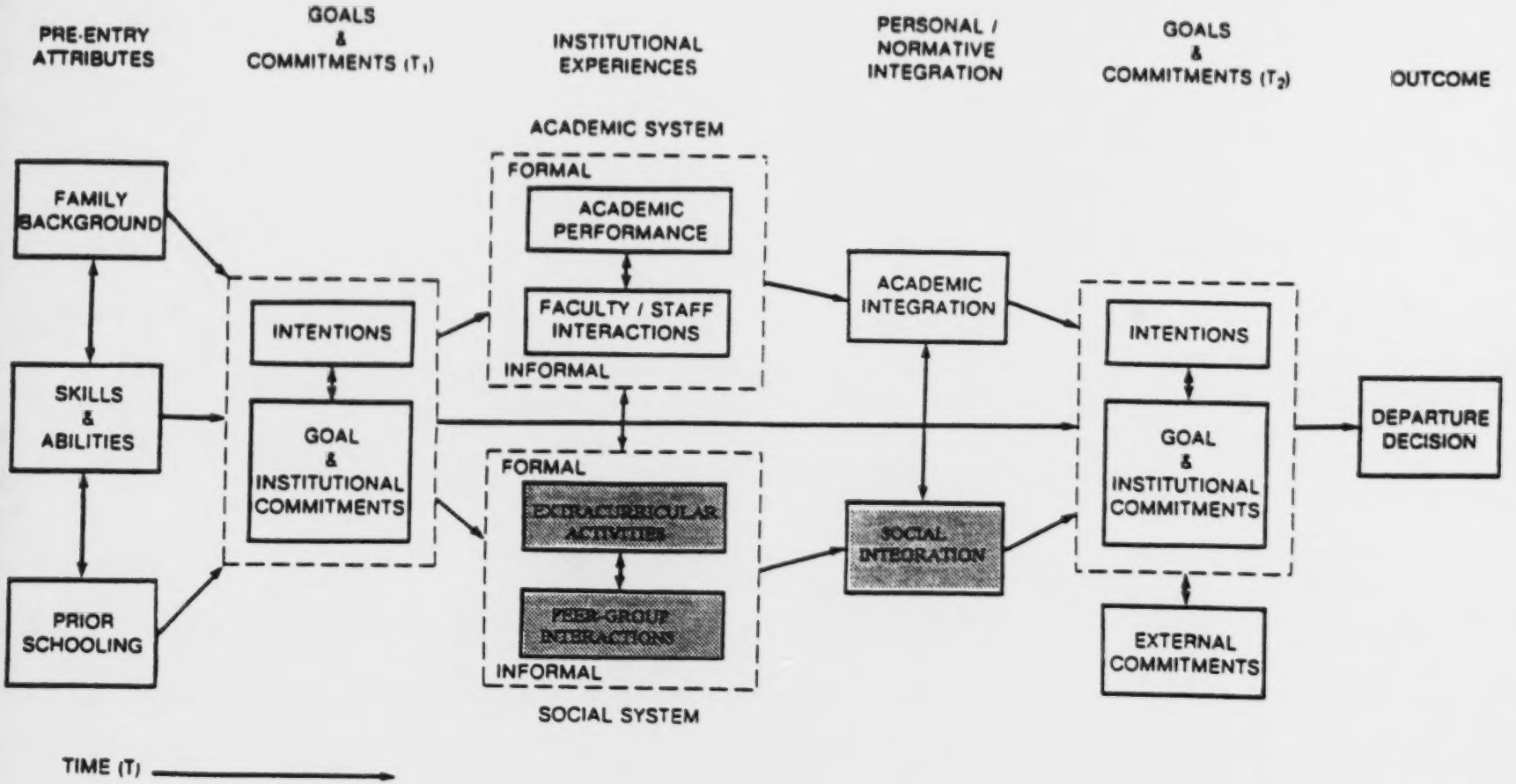

Fig. 1 A model of institutional departure (Tinto, 1987, p.114)

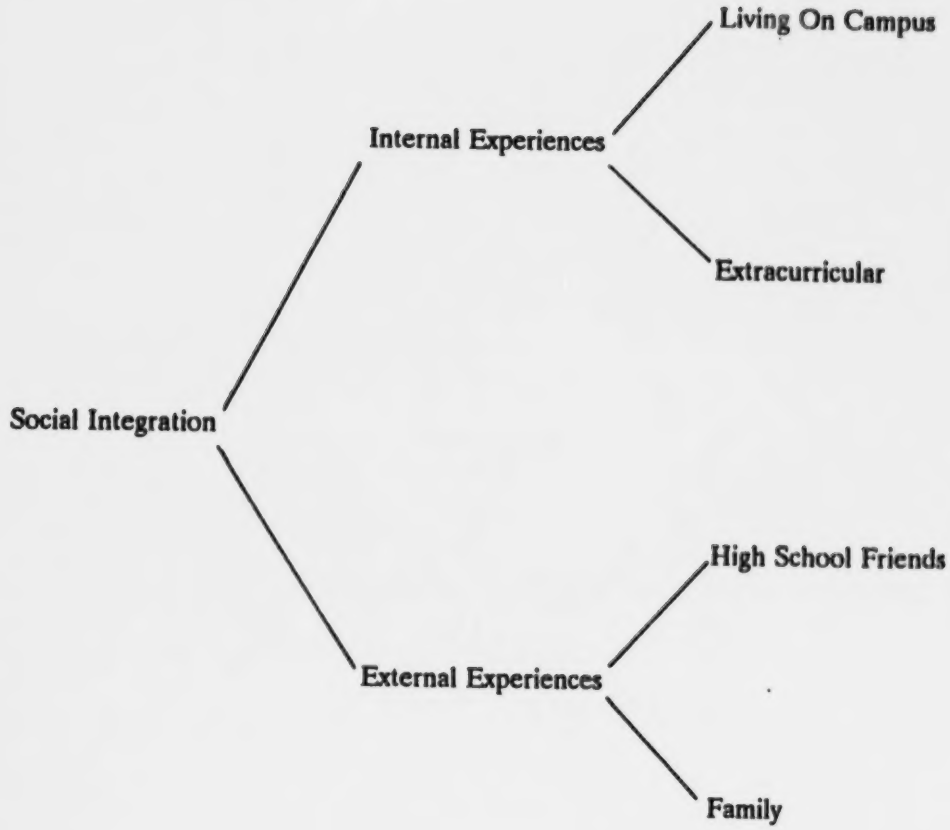

Figure 2. Taxonomy of Findings Regarding Social Integration

Access to Non-University High School Friends

Residence	Easy	Limited
On Campus	"I feel like it's a waste for me to go out and get involved [at the university] because I feel like, "Well, I'm not going to be here for that [campus activity], well I'm not going to be here for that one either."	"I have my grounds. I have so many things that I couldn't leave now. All my friends and everything. I have a lot of friends [at this university]."
Off Campus	"Most [of my friends] are from my high school. Not here [at the university]."	"I get a big feeling of loneliness. I like the independence but loneliness isn't good. I live off campus...I don't have many friends."

Table 1. The Influence of Access and Residence on Students' Experiences with Non-University High School Friends and Social Integration.